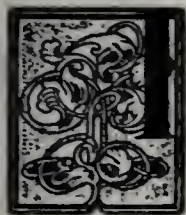


## Bill's School and Mine.

BY W. S. FRANKLIN.



ALWAYS think of my school as my boyhood. Until I was big enough to swim the Missouri River my home was in a little Kansas town, and we boys lived in the woods and in the water all Summer, and in the woods and on the ice all Winter. We trapped and hunted, we rowed and fished, and built dams, and cut stick horses, and kept stick-horse livery stables where the grape-vines hung, and where the paw-paws mellowed in the Fall. We made mud slides into our swimming hole, and we were artists in mud-tattoo, painting face and body with thin black mud and scraping white stripes from head to foot. We climbed the trees and cut our names, we sucked the sap of the box elder and squashed poke berries for war paint. We picked wild grapes and gooseberries, and made pop-guns to shoot green haws. In the Autumn we gathered walnuts, and in the Spring we greeted the johnny-jump-ups, and the sweet williams as they peered through the mold.

We boys were always out of doors, as it seems to me; and I did the chores. It is something to learn the toughness of hickory under the saw, how easily walnut splits, how mean elm is to handle; and a certain dexterity comes to a boy who teaches a calf to drink, or slop hogs without soiling his Sunday clothes in the evening. And the hay makes acrobats. In the loft a boy learns to turn flip-flops, and with a lariat rope he can make a trapeze. My rings were made by padding the iron rings from the hubs of a lumber wagon and swinging them from the rafters.

Bill, little Bethlehem Bill, has a better school than I had; the house and the things that go with it. Bill's teachers know more accurately what they are about than did my teachers in the old days out West half a century ago. And, of course, Bill is getting things from his school that I did not get. But he is growing up with a woefully distorted idea of life. What does Bill know about the woods and the flowers? Where in Bill's make-up is that which comes from browsing on berries and nuts and the rank paw paw, and roaming the woods like the Bander-log? And the crops, what does he know about them?

The silver-sides used to live in the pool under the limestone ledges by the old stone quarry where the snakes would sun themselves at noon. The wild rose, with its cinnamon-scented flower and curling leaves, used to bloom in May for me—for me and a little brown-eyed girl who found her ink-bottle filled with them when the school bell called us in from play. And on Saturdays we boys roamed over the prairies picking wild flowers, playing wild plays and dreaming wild dreams—children's dreams. Do you suppose that little Bill dreams such dreams in a fifty-foot lot with only his mother's flowers in the window pots to teach him the great mystery of life?

Bill has no barn. I doubt if he can skin a cat, and I am sure he cannot do the big drop from the trapeze. To turn a flip-flop would fill him with alarm, and yet Jim Betts, out in Kansas, used to turn a double flip-flop over a stack of barrels!

And Jim Betts is a man to look at. He is built by the day. He has an educated body, and it is going into its fifties with health and strength that Bill will have to work for. And Jim Betts and I used to make our own kites and nigger-shooters and sleds and rabbit traps.

Bill's school seems real enough, but his play and his work seem rather empty. Of course Bill cannot have the fringe of a million square miles of wild buffalo range for his out-of-doors. No, Bill cannot have that. Never, again. And to imagine that Bill needs anything of the kind is to forget the magic of Bill's "make-believe!" A tree, a brook, a stretch of grass! What old-world things Bill's fancy can create there! What untold history repeats itself in Bill's most fragmentary play! Bill, is by nature, a conjuror. Give him but little and he will make a world for himself, and grow to be a man. Older people seem, however, to forget, and deprive Bill of the little that he needs; and it is worth while, therefore, to develop the contrast between Bill's school and that school of mine in the long-ago land of my boyhood out-of-doors.

The Land of Out-of-Doors! What irony there is in such glowing phrase to city boys like Bill! The supreme delight of my own boyhood days was to gather wild flowers in a wooded hollow, to reach which led across a sunny stretch of wild meadow rising to the sky; and I would have you know that I lived as a boy in a land where a weed never grew.\* I wish that Bill might have access to the places where the wild flowers grow, and above all I wish that Bill might have more opportunity to see his father at work. A hundred years ago these things were within the reach of every boy and girl; but now, alas, Bill sees no other manual labor than the digging of a ditch in a cluttered street, or stunted in growth, he has almost become a part of the machine he daily tends, and Boyville has become a paved and guttered city, high-walled, desolate, and dirty; with here and there a vacant lot hideous with refuse in early Spring and overwhelmed with an increas-

\*The western prairies, except in the very center of the Mississippi Valley, are beautifully rolling, and they meet every stream with deeply carved bluffs. In the early days every stream was fringed with woods; and prairie and woodland, alike, knew nothing beyond the evenly balanced contest of indigenous life. There came, however, a succession of strange epidemics, as one after another of our noxious weeds gained foothold in that fertile land. I remember well several years when dog-fennel grew in every nook and corner of my home town in Kansas; then, after a few years, a variety of thistle grew to the exclusion of every other uncultivated thing; and then followed a curious epidemic of tumble-weed, a low spreading annual which broke off at the ground in the Fall and was rolled across the open country in countless millions by the Autumn winds. I remember well my first lone "beggar louse," and how pretty I thought it was! And my first dandelion, and of that I have never changed my opinion!



ing pestilence of weeds as the Summer days go by! And the strangest thing about it all is, that Bill accepts unquestioningly, and even with manifestations of joy, just any sort of a world, if only it is flooded with sunshine.

I remember how, in my boyhood, the rare advent of an old tin can in my favorite swimming hole used to offend me, while such a thing as a cast-off shoe was simply intolerable, and I wonder that Bill's unquenchable delight in out-door life does not become an absolute rage in his indifference to the dreadful pollution of the streams and the universal pestilence of weeds and refuse in our thickly populated districts.

I cannot refrain from quoting an amusing poem of James Whitcomb Riley's, which expresses (more completely than anything I know) the delight of boys in out-door life, where so many things happen and so many things lure; and you can easily catch in the swing of Riley's verse that wanton note which is ordinarily so fascinatingly boyish, but which may too easily turn to a raging indifference to everything that makes for purity in this troubled life of ours.

### THREE JOLLY HUNTERS.

O there were three jolly youngsters;  
And a-hunting they did go,  
With a setter-dog and a pointer-dog  
And a yaller-dog also.  
Looky there!

And they hunted and they hal-looed;  
And the first thing they did find  
Was a dingling-dangling hornets' nest  
A-swinging in the wind.  
Looky there!

And the first one said, "What is it?"  
Said the next, "Let's punch and see,"  
And the third one said, a mile from there,  
"I wish we'd let it be!"  
Looky there! (Showing the back of his neck.)

And they hunted and they hal-looed;  
And the next thing they did raise  
Was a bobbin bunnie cotton-tail  
That vanished from their gaze.  
Looky there!

One said it was a hot baseball,  
Zippt thru the brambly thatch,  
But the others said 'twas a note by post  
Or a telegraph dispatch.  
Looky there!

So they hunted and they hal-looed;  
And the next thing they did sight,  
Was a great big bull-dog chasing them,  
And a farmer hollering "Skite!"  
Looky there!

And the first one said "Hi-jinktum!"  
And the next, "Hi-kinktum-jee!"  
And the last one said, "Them very words  
Has just occurred to me!"  
Looky there! (Showing the tattered seat of his pants.)

This is the hunting song of the American Ban-

der-log\*, and this kind of hunting is better than the kind that needs a gun. To one who falls into the habit of it, the gun is indeed a useless tool. I am reminded of a day I spent with a gun in a remote part of the Rocky Mountains, where, during the 25 days I have camped there on four different trips, I have seen as many as 150 of the wildest of North American animals, the Rocky Mountain sheep. I lay in ambush for three hours waiting for sheep, and the sheep came; but they were out of range again before I saw them because I had become so interested in killing mosquitoes! I timed myself at intervals, and 80 per minute for three solid hours makes an honest estimate of 14,400. And I was hungry, too. I fancy the sheep were not frightened but wished the good work to go on undisturbed.

Do you, perhaps, like candy? Did you ever consider that the only sweetmeat our forefathers had for thousands of years was wild honey? And those sour times—if I may call them such—before the days of sugar and candy, come much nearer to us than you realize, for I can remember my own grandfather's tales of bee-hunting in Tennessee. Just imagine how exciting it must have been in the days of long-ago to find a tree loaded with—candy! A bee tree! If Bill were to go back with me to the wild woods of Tennessee, some thrill of that old excitement would well up from the depths of his soul at finding such a tree. You may wonder what I am driving at, so I will tell you, that one of the most exciting experiences of my boyhood was a battle with a colony of bumble bees. I was led into it by an older companion and the ardor and excitement of that battle, as I even now remember it, are wholly inexplicable to

### \*ROAD-SONG OF THE BANDER-LOG.

(From Kipling's Jungle-Book.)

Here we go in a flung festoon,  
Half way up to the jealous moon!  
Don't you envy our pranceful bands?  
Don't you wish your feet were hands?  
Wouldn't you like if your tails were—so—  
Curved in the shape of a cupid's bow?  
Now you're angry, but—never mind—  
Brother, thy tail hangs down behind!

Here we sit in a branchy row,  
Thinking of beautiful things we know;  
Dreaming of deeds we mean to do,  
All complete in a minute or two—  
Something noble and grand and good,  
Done by merely wishing we could.  
Now we're going to—never mind—  
Brother, thy tail hangs down behind!

All the talk we ever have heard  
Uttered by bat, or beast, or bird—  
Hide or scale or skin or feather—  
Jabber it quickly and altogether!  
Excellent! Wonderful! Once again!  
Now we are talking just like men.  
Let's pretend we are—never mind—  
Brother, thy tail hangs down behind!  
This is the way of the Monkey-kind.

Then join our leaping lines that scumfish through  
the pines,  
That rocket by where light and high the wild  
grape swings.  
By the rubbish in our wake, by the noble noise we  
make,  
Be sure, be sure, we're going to do some splen-  
did things.



me except I think of it as a representation through inherited instinct of a ten-thousand-years' search for wild honey.

My schooling grew out of instinctive reactions toward natural things; hunting and fishing, digging and planting in the Spring, nutting in the Fall, and the thousands of variations which these things involve, and I believe that the play of instinct is the only solid basis of growth of a boy or girl. I believe, furthermore, that the very essence of boy humor is bound up with the amazing incongruity of his instincts. Was there ever a boy whose instincts (many of them mere fatuity like his digestive appendix) have not led him time and again into just thin air, to say nothing of water and mud! For my part I have never known anything more supremely funny than learning what a hopeless mess of wood pulp and worms a bumble-bee's nest really is, except, perhaps, seeing another boy learn the same stinging lesson.

The use of formulas, too, is unquestionably instinctive, and we all know how apt a boy is to indulge in formulas of the hocus-pocus sort, like Tom Sawyer's receipt for removing warts by the combined charm of black midnight and a black cat, dead. And a boy arrives only late in his boyhood, if ever, to some sense of the distinction between formulas of this kind and such as are vital and rational. I think that there is much instruction and a great deal of humor connected with the play of this instinctive tendency. I remember a great big boy, a hired man on my grandfather's farm, in fact, who was led into a fight with a nest of hornets with the expectation that he would bear a charmed skin if he shouted in loud repetition the words, "Jew's-harp, jew's-harp."

Talk about catching birds by putting salt on their tails! Once, as I rowed around a bend on a small stream, I saw a sand-hill crane stalking along the shore. Into the water I went with the suddenly conceived idea that I could catch that crane, and, swimming low, I reached the shore, about 20 feet from the bird, jumped quickly out of the water, made a sudden dash and the bird was captured! Once I saw a catfish, gasping for air at the surface of water that had been muddied by the opening of a sluice-way in a dam. Swimming up behind the fish, I jammed a hand into each gill, and, helped by the fish's tail, I pushed it ashore; and it weighed 36 pounds! A friend of mine, by the name of Stebbins, once followed his dog in a chase after a jack rabbit. The rabbit made a wide circle and came back to its own trail some distance ahead of the dog, then it made a big sidewise jump, and sat looking at the dog as it passed by; so intently indeed that Stebbins walked up behind the rabbit and took it up with his hands.

I think you will agree with me that my outdoor school was a wonderful thing. The Land of Out-of-Doors! To young people the best school and play-house, and to older people an endless asylum of delight.

The grass so little has to do,  
A sphere of simple green  
With only butterflies to brood  
And bees to entertain.

And stir all day to pretty tunes  
The breezes fetch along,  
And hold the sunshine in its lap  
And bow—to everything.

And thread the dew all night, like pearls,  
And make itself so fine,

A duchess were too common  
For such a noticing.

And even when it dies, to pass  
In odors so divine  
As lowly spices gone to sleep,  
Or amulets of pine.

And then to dwell in sovereign barns  
And dream the days away,  
The grass so little has to do—  
I wish I were the hay.

The most important thing, I should say, for the success of Bill's fine school is that ample opportunity be given to Bill for every variety of play including swimming and skating, and wherever possible, boating. It is ridiculous to attempt to teach Bill anything without the substantial results of play to build upon. Playgrounds are the cheapest and, in many respects, the best of schools, but they are almost entirely lacking in many of our towns which have grown to cities in a generation in this great nation of villagers. The Boroughs of the Bethlehems, for example, have no playground connected with a Public School, nor any other public place where boys can play ball.

#### WHAT DO YOU THINK?

(This and the following communication are from a small paper, printed and published by two Bethlehem boys.)

We, the editors, have been dragged along back alleys, across open sewers, and through rank growths of weed and thistle to view the Monocacy meadows to consider the possibility of their use as a playground or park. We are not much impressed with the proposal, the place is apparently hopeless, but the park enthusiast could not be touched by argument. To our very practical objection that the cost would be excessive, he made the foolish reply that there is no cost but a saving in using what has hitherto been wasted. To our expressed disgust for the open sewers and filth he replied that that was beside the question, for, as he said, we must sooner or later take care of the filth anyway. But, we said, the creek is contaminated above the town. Very well, he replied we have the right to prohibit such contamination. But worst of all, in double meaning, was his instant agreement to our statement that we had our cemeteries which, he said, were really better than any Bethlehem park could be.

#### COMMUNICATION.

Dear Editors: I took a walk along the Monocacy Creek on Sunday afternoon and discovered clear water several miles above town and a fine skating pond; but I suppose that you and all of your subscribers will have to go to our enterprising neighbor, Allentown, to find any well-kept ice to skate on this Winter. Most people think that you boys can swim in Nature's own water, skate on Nature's own ice, and roam in Nature's own woods, but it is absolutely certain that your elders must take some care and pains if you town boys are to do any of these things. And yet, here in the East, children are said to be brought up (implying care and pains) and hogs are said to be raised (implying only feeding). I thank the Lord that I was "raised" in the West where there are no such false distinctions.

Your subscriber, S.



P.S.—As I came home covered with beggar-lice and cockle-burrs I saw a ring of fire on South Mountain, an annual occurrence which has been delayed a whole week this Autumn by a flourish of posters in several languages offering One Hundred Dollars Reward!

In these days of steam and electricity we boast of having conquered nature. Well, we have got to domesticate nature before much else can be accomplished in this country of ours. We have got to take care of our brooks and our rivers, of our open lands and our wooded hills. We have got to do it, and Bill would be better off if we took half of the cost of his fine school to meet the expense of doing it. When I was a boy I belonged to the Bander-log, but Bill belongs to another tribe, the Rats, and there is nothing I would like so much to do as to turn Pied Piper and lure the entire brood of Bethlehem boys and girls to Friedensville\* and into the awful chasm of crystal water to come back no more, no, not even when an awakened civic consciousness had made a park of the beautiful Monocacy meadows and converted the creek into a chain, a regular Diamond Necklace of swimming holes. I beg the garbage men's (not a printer's error for man's) pardon for speaking of the beautiful Monocacy meadows. I refer to what has been and to what might easily continue to be. As for the Diamond Necklace, that, of course, would have to be above our gas works where the small stream of pure tar now joins the main stream.

I know a small river in Kansas which is bordered by rich bottom lands from one-half to one mile in width between beautifully scalloped bluffs—where the upland prairie ends. In the early days thick covering of grass was everywhere, and the clear stream, teeming with life, wound its way along a deep channel among scattered clusters of large walnut trees and dense groves of elm and cotton wood, rippling here and there over beds of rock. Now, however, every foot of ground, high and low, is mellowed by the plow, and the last time I saw the once beautiful valley of Wolf River it was as if the whole earth had melted with the rains of June, such devastation of mud was there! Surely it requires more than the plow to domesticate nature; indeed, since I have lived between the coal-bearing Alleghenies and the sea, I have come to believe that it may require more than the plow and the crowded iron furnace, such pestilence of refuse and filth is here!

I suppose that I am as familiar with the requirements of modern industry as any man living, and as ready to tolerate everything that is economically wise, but every day as I walk to and fro I see our Monocacy Creek covered with a scum of tar, and in crossing the river bridge I see a half mile long heap of rotting refuse serving the Lehigh as a bank on the southern side; not all furnace refuse either by any means, but nameless stinking stuff cast off by an indifferent population and carelessly left in its very midst in one long

\*The site of an abandoned zinc mine, where a few of the Bethlehem boys go to swim.

unprecedented panorama of putrescent ugliness! And when, on splendid Autumn days, the nearby slopes of old South Mountain lift the eyes into pure oblivion of these distressing things, I see again and again a line of fire sweeping through the scanty woods. This I have seen every Autumn since first I came to Bethlehem.

It is easy to speak in amusing hyperbole of garbage heaps and of brooks befouled with tar, but to have seen one useless flourish of posters on South Mountain in fifteen years! That is beyond any possible touch of humor. It is indeed unfortunate that our river is not fit for boys to swim in, and it is not, for I have tried it, and I am not fastidious either, having lived an amphibious boyhood on the banks of the muddiest river in the world; but it is a positive disgrace that our river is not fit to look at, that it is good for nothing whatever but to drink; much too good, one would think, for people who protect the only stretch of woodland that is accessible to their boys and girls by a mere flourish of posters!

I was born in Kansas when its inhabitants were largely Indians, and when its greatest resource was wild buffalo skins; and whatever objection you may have to this description of my present home-place between the coal-bearing Alleghenies and the sea, please do not imagine that I have a sophisticated sentimentality towards the Beauties of Nature! No, I am still enough of an Indian to think chiefly of my belly when I look at a stretch of country. In the West I like the suggestion of hog-and-hominy which spreads for miles and miles beneath the sky, and here in the East I like the promise of pillars of fire and smoke and I like the song of steam!

Bill's School and Mine! It may seem that I have said a great deal about my school, and very little about Bill's. But what is Bill's school? Surely, Bill's fine school-house and splendid teachers, and Bill's good mother are not all there is to Bill's school. No, Bill's school is as big as all Bethlehem, and in its bigger aspects it is a bad school, bad because Bill has no opportunity to play as a boy should play, and bad because Bill has no opportunity to work as a boy should work.

"I b'en a-kinde musin', as the feller says, and I'm About o' the conclusion that they ain't no better time,

When you come to cypher on it, than the times we used to know,

When we swore our first 'dog-gone-it' sorto sol-em'-like and low.

"You git my idy, do you?—LITTLE tads, you understand—

Jes' a wishin', thue and thue you, that you on'y was a MAN.

Yet here I am this minute, even forty, to a day, And fergittin' all that's in it, wishin' jes the other way!"

I wonder if our Bill will "wish the other way" when he is a man? Indeed, I wonder if he will ever BE a man. If, we could only count on that, Bill's school would not be our problem.